

Déjà lu

Foreword: Antonie Brandeis, an Early German Woman Visitor to Nauru

Hilary Howes*

The following work is an English translation of a German-language article by Antonie Thawka Brandeis, née Ruete (1868–1945), a collector, ethnographer, and colonial activist who visited Nauru in 1903. It was originally published in 1907 in the journal *Globus* and is one of only two published articles on Nauru by this author known to exist (Brandeis 1907, 1908). Translation and Open Access publication costs were funded by the Embassy of the Federal Republic of Germany in Canberra, Australia, through the *Kleiner Kultur- und Wissenschaftsfonds* of the German Federal Foreign Office. The Embassy gratefully acknowledges the work of translator Katarina Steiner and the support of Linguaset Translations, ACT, Australia. The Embassy also acknowledges the assistance of Alameda Lauti, former director of the University of the South Pacific Nauru Campus, who encouraged translation of this work, and the detailed research and publications of ethnologist Godwin Kornes (2021a, 2021b, 2021c, 2021d) in the context of a recent provenance research project funded by the German Lost Art Foundation (2023).

Readers are advised that the contents of this translation do not necessarily reflect the views of the German Government. It is important to bear in mind that the original German-language article is a product of its time and reflects the perspectives and attitudes of the author, including views that readers today may find biased, racist, or otherwise offensive.

Having said this, it is also important to note that the accounts of German-speaking visitors to the Pacific region during the 19th and early 20th centuries often contained detailed information about traditional ways of life in the Pacific Island States and are thus potentially of great interest to Pacific

Islanders today. Translating such accounts into English and making them widely accessible to local communities is a significant aspect of Germany's cultural diplomacy. In relation to former German colonial territories such as Nauru, it is also a way of coming to terms with a complex and often challenging shared past. This is an ongoing endeavour and German diplomatic missions accredited to the Pacific Island States have funded translations of a number of comparable works in recent years (Federal Foreign Office 2023a, 2023b, 2023c).

In this context, Antonie Brandeis' work stands out as one of only a few colonial-era publications by a female author. Regardless of their profession, the majority of German-speakers who visited or settled in the Pacific during the colonial era were men. Certainly there were exceptions, including a significant number of Catholic and Protestant missionary sisters, as well as the wives of explorers, government functionaries, merchants, plantation owners, professional scientists, Protestant missionaries, and traders (Hezel 2001; Loosen 2014; Stornig 2013). Brandeis, for example, visited Nauru in the context of six years (1898–1904) spent on Jaluit Atoll accompanying her husband Eugen, then German imperial governor of the Marshall Islands. However, it was unusual for such women to publish on their experiences. Those who did rarely received the recognition accorded to their male counterparts. Brandeis' contemporary Elisabeth Krämer-Bannow, who joined her husband Augustin Krämer on three separate expeditions to the Pacific over the years 1906–1910, published two articles and a book, and contributed numerous sketches, watercolours, and written descriptions to the published volumes resulting from the Hamburg South Seas Expedition of 1908–1910. Despite these important contributions, 'her role as her husband's research partner was never fully recognized, either during her lifetime or long after' (Salmond 2018: 156; see also Mönter 2008).

Similarly, although Eugen Brandeis acknowledged that it was his wife Antonie who had

* hilary.howes@anu.edu.au

compiled what is now known as the Eugen and Antonie Brandeis Oceania Collection held in the Museum Natur und Mensch in Freiburg im Breisgau, Germany, until very recently only Eugen “received the honour and accolades for his donation” (Kornes 2021b; see also Salmond 2018: 157–160). The collection comprises 288 inventory numbers (307 individual objects in total), 59 of which are from Nauru (Kornes 2021d: 9f.; Städtische Museen Freiburg im Breisgau, undated). Antonie did not collect the objects from Nauru herself; instead, Ludwig Kaiser, the German imperial district officer on Nauru from 1899 to 1905, obtained them at the Brandeis’ request (Kornes 2021c).

As already mentioned, Antonie visited Nauru herself in 1903. She had developed a keen interest in ethnology during her stay on Jaluit Atoll, collecting artefacts and teaching herself photography. During a visit to Berlin in 1901, she attended lectures given by leading German ethnologist Felix von Luschan, and later corresponded with him about her collecting activities. She obtained a number of items for von Luschan during her stay in Nauru, including string figures, and later arranged for the German station chief on Nauru to supply him with two human skulls for his collection (Kornes 2021a, 2021d: 20–22). It is not clear how much time she spent on Nauru or with whom she interacted. Her main informant appears to have been an unnamed “English trader” who had “lived on Nauru for many years, was married to a native woman and was thoroughly familiar with [Nauruan] manners and customs” (Brandeis, undated [quoted in Kornes 2021d: 21]).

Kornes (2021b) and Salmond (2018: 158–160) have acknowledged Brandeis’ “ambivalent legacy,” noting her “complex position as a woman of colour” – her mother, Emily Ruete, born Sayyida Salama (Salmé) bint Sa’id Al-Sa’id, was a daughter of the Sultan of Oman and Zanzibar – “occupying a privileged position within a repressive colonial regime.” On the one hand, Brandeis “unwaveringly identified with the ideology of colonialism as a civilising mission,” and her publications include “exoticizing and [...] racist views” (Kornes 2021b, 2021d: 15). On the other hand, her collection encompasses a “thoughtful and detailed selection of objects” with an emphasis on “the working and living habits of Micronesian women,” accompanied by photographs “showing artefacts in use,” as well as written descriptions such as the one published in translation below (Salmond 2018: 159; Städtische Museen Freiburg im Breisgau, undated). Together, these objects, photographs and written descriptions offer a rare

female perspective on everyday life in Nauru more than one hundred years ago.

References Cited

Brandeis, Antonie

- 1907 Ethnographische Beobachtungen über die Nauru-Insulaner. *Globus* 91/4: 57–78.
1908 Nauru. *Deutsche Kolonialzeitung* 25/34: 599f.

Federal Foreign Office

- 2023a Germany and the Republic of Nauru. Bilateral Relations, 23 October 2023. <<http://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/en/aussenpolitik/laenderinformationen/nauru-node/nauru/233314>> [07.12.2023].
2023b Germany and Papua New Guinea. Bilateral Relations, 27 October 2023. <<https://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/en/aussenpolitik/papuanewguinea/235720>> [07.12.2023].
2023c Germany and Palau. Bilateral Relations, 8 November 2023. <<https://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/en/aussenpolitik/laenderinformationen/palau-node/palau/235750>> [07.12.2023].

German Lost Art Foundation

- 2023 The Antonie and Eugen Brandeis Oceania Collection is Published Online, 31 May 2023. <<https://kulturgutverluste.de/en/news/antonie-and-eugen-brandeis-oceania-collection-published-online>> [07.12.2023].

Hezel, Francis X.

- 2001 German Catholic Missions in Micronesia. Micronesian Seminar. <<https://micssem.org/article/german-catholic-missions-in-micronesia/>> [07.12.2023].

Kornes, Godwin

- 2021a Zwischen Hamburg und Jaluit. Die Sammlerin, Ethnographin und Kolonialaktivistin Antonie Brandeis, geb. Ruete. *Hamburgische Geschichten*, 9 May 2021. <<https://hamburgische-geschichten.de/2021/05/09/zwischen-hamburg-und-jaluit-die-sammlerin-ethnographin-und-kolonialaktivistin-antonie-brandeis-geb-ruete>> [7.12.2023].
2021b The Ambivalence of Gender. The Collector, Ethnographer and Colonial Women’s Movement Activist Antonie Brandeis. *Boasblogs*, 10 May 2021. <<https://boasblogs.org/dcntr/the-ambivalence-of-gender>> [7.12.2023].
2021c Ludwig Kaiser (1862–1906). Südbadischer Kolonialbeamter auf den Marshallinseln und Nauru. *Freiburg Postkolonial*, 22 October 2021. <<https://www.freiburg-postkolonial.de/pdf/Kaiser-Ludwig.pdf>> [7.12.2023].
2021d Sammlerin, Ethnographin, Kolonialaktivistin: Neue Erkenntnisse zur Mikronesien-Sammlung von Antonie Brandeis. *Paideuma: Mitteilungen zur Kulturkunde* 67: 7–34.

Loosen, Livia

- 2014 *Deutsche Frauen in den Südsee-Kolonien des Kaiserreichs. Alltag und Beziehungen zur indigenen Bevölkerung, 1884–1919*. Bielefeld: Transcript Verlag.

Mönter, Sven

- 2008 “Out of the Shadow”. Biographical Details of Elisabeth Krämer-Bannow or “the Woman behind Dr. Augustin Krämer”. Graduate Conference Day Seminar, Department of History, University of Auckland, 12 August 2008. <<https://docplayer.net/45718164-Out-of-the-sh>

adow-biographical-details-of-elisabeth-kramer-bannow-or-the-woman-behind-dr-augustin-kramer.html> [07.12.2023].

Salmond, Amiria

2018 German Women Collectors in the Pacific: Elizabeth Krämer-Bannow and Antonie Brandeis. In: Lucie Carreau et al. (eds), *Pacific Presences*. Vol. 2: Oceanic Art and European Museums; pp. 155–160. Leiden: Sidestone Press.

Städtische Museen Freiburg im Breisgau

Undated Die Ozeaniensammlung von Antonie und Eugen Brandeis. <<https://onlinesammlung.freiburg.de/de/alben/brandeis>> [07.12.2023].

Stornig, Katharina

2013 Sisters Crossing Boundaries. German Missionary Nuns in Colonial Togo and New Guinea, 1897–1960. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht.

Ethnographic Observations about the Nauru Islanders¹

Antonie Brandeis

The island of Nauru is an isolated island of volcanic origin in the Pacific Ocean, located west of the Gilbert Islands group at 166°51' eastern longitude and 0°27' southern latitude. The island covers approximately 18 km in area and is surrounded by a 100 m to 150 m wide coral reef which drops off steeply into the sea. The fertile ring rises up to 5 m; this is then followed by cliffs reaching a height of up to 30 m. The centre of the island is occupied by a high plateau that is marked with a few depressions. At one place there is a large pond, the bottom of which is said to be connected to the seawater. The highland areas of the island are rocky, they have only sparse vegetation and are covered several feet deep with high grade phosphate.

There are six districts in Nauru: *menin* (= windy), *bog me eiwu* (= western), the two bush districts *boater* and *arunibeck*, *eowa* and *eniburi* (their meaning is unknown).

Each hut is occupied by one family only, which is on average comprised of three to five family members. However, the father, the mother and the children are sometimes joined by the unmarried brothers and sisters of the parents. Upon marriage, the husband always moves into the house

of the wife. When the eldest daughter enters into marriage, then the parents give her their existing house and they build for themselves a new home nearby. Every additional daughter receives a new house in the vicinity upon her marriage. The settlements are laid out without any specific rules. What was considered decisive in Nauru were favourable passages in the reef and the presence of freshwater holes or water-bearing caves. The settlements were always established by one family or by several related families, and all are named. The increase in population is slow, the current number stands at approximately 1500 persons. About 500 people were killed in the battles which took place 20 to 30 years ago. The battles lasted for about 30 years. In the year 1888 the island was placed under German protection and the islanders were disarmed, which brought an end to the warring.

The population is made up of people brought to Nauru from the Gilbert Islands, the Marshall Islands and the Caroline Islands. But at the same time a population of pure Malaysian origin is also clearly in evidence. There are people to be found here who are reminiscent of Hindus. It is particularly noticeable for many men to have a noble skull shape as well as a fine nose and a well-shaped mouth (see Figure 1).

Canoe building is practised only within certain families. Fishing is done by all the inhabitants of that part of the coastal belt that is close to the sea, while the hill dwellers and those who reside in the bush only catch fish in the inland ponds.

The houses are built in a rectangle of 15 to 25 feet in size; the posts are 4 feet high and are made from the hard wood of the *Calophyllum* tree, and sometimes also from the trunks of the palm tree. The inner beams are made from pandanus logs. All these parts are tied together with coconut rope. The different parts of the house are called: *Yvar* = post, *Ikwoar* = roof framework, *Oyao* = rear gable frame, *Kadön* = rafter, *Denapot* = leaf roof, *Kaëb* = floor/ground, *Daman* = narrow sides. The roof is made from pandanus leaves, and since it does not rain much in Nauru it will last four to five years.

There are no meeting houses as such. In earlier times large dancing houses were in existence, and one of them was allocated to each district.

The cooking houses are actually covered earth ovens, of the type commonly used throughout the South Seas. The food is either baked or steamed on hot stones. The steam required for this is produced by pouring a small amount of water over the stones.

In the past, the islanders had birthing houses set up near their residential houses. A postpartum

¹ See the article by A. Krämer about Nauru, *Globus*, Vol. 74, No. 10. 4